

# A STORY OF ACTION, LOVE, SURPRISES

And the Old Contrast Between the Orient  
and the Occident

HE HAD almost spoken. The words had half formed themselves upon his lips as they sat, speeding eastward across the desert, in her drawing room on the "Sunset Limited." He had not realized that he truly loved her until that afternoon the week before, when he had seen her coming down the white marble steps of the eucalyptus-lined terrace of Tommy Burnham's marvelous "Mediterranean" house at Santa Barbara.

Anna Borland was small, sleek-eyed, olive-skinned—exquisitely pretty in a subtle eastern way that lent itself to diaphanous, floating garments and many-hued turbans. It was the turban that had done it. Gifford Rand was anything but imaginative, but that afternoon he had felt the mystery of the past about him.

So he waited for her beside the lily-pool, smoking a cigarette at the bottom of the moss-green steps, and she had come drifting down toward him through the lilac bushes like a Persian princess—and all in one magic moment it had come over him that he adored her.

Anna had drifted down Tommy Burnham's terrace toward the lily-pool on several occasions toward other young men, but nothing had come of it. This time the husky tones of Rand's voice, the strained look in his eyes, had told her that something had happened to him. Now as he sat opposite her on the train she waited anxiously for the simple question that would make her future secure. Why had he not spoken? The silence was becoming awkward. Well, there would be plenty of other occasions before they reached New York! She would make them.

"What myriads of flowers!" she exclaimed, looking through the window. "Purple and gold and scarlet! Like the gleaming cohorts of Assurbanipal. The embankment is covered with them."

"Fanny, how they grow right out of the sand!" he ventured, striving to resurrect some faint recollection of who Assurbanipal might be. "You wouldn't think they'd find enough nourishment there."

"They're effective only in the mass!" she rejoined. "Individual wild flowers are coarse, compared with cultivated ones. Beauty needs nurture, and the right soil, properly prepared."

"Sometimes they grow where you see the rose as where some hardy Caesar died; that every bristling garden warrior dropped in her lap from some once lovely head!"

He listened reverently, although to his dull mind it was not clear just what Caesar had to do with it. Neither was he satisfied that she was right about the wild flowers.

"There were barbed wire, for instance; he thought them very pretty. And lilacs-of-the-valley."

Anna's taste was perfect, as any one could see. Too bad he wasn't more up to it!

On every side stretched the golden plain. To the north the purple Sierras; to the southwest the snow-crowned San Bernardino against a delicately pink sky. Color and sun-light everywhere! Far away across the sea of windows a single lone ranch house stood in the square of brown, where some intrepid soul was struggling to wrench a living from the sand. What a life! Yet it had points. You were outdoors all the time!

He turned and rediscovered Anna. "How would you like to live there?" he asked her.

She smiled at him through half-lowered lids.

"With me along some strip of herbage strewn That just divides the desert from the sown, Where man of slave and sultan is forgot, And peace to Mahmud on his golden throne."

"You found it pretty rough, I guess!" he grumbled, embarrassed.

"You know the rest of it, don't you?" she persisted, tilting softly on the trail of opportunity.

"Of what?"

"Of what I was quoting!"

"No—what is it?"

"Fitzgerald's paraphrase of the 'Rubaiyat' of course."

last station. They had passed none but at least an hour. By consulting the timetable in his pocket, he learned that the train would pass no other for a couple of hours more. The next train was not due until 4:30 the next morning.

THE sun had set, and black shadows were linking themselves across the plain. He shivered, glad of the leather coat which he had slipped on as a protection against the dust.

He climbed down the embankment—and started through the greasewood to find a road, but a half-hour's search revealed not even a wagon track.

He retraced his steps to the track. Some wildcat engine or freight train might happen along. He must have a signal. His knife made no impression upon the rhinoceros hide of the yucca, and the mesquite thorns quickly covered his hands with blood. Moreover, his pursuit of the train had made him very thirsty. But nowhere was there any sign of water.

It had grown dark and the wind had risen. Rand took refuge in the small arroyo beside the track. He kicked a hole in the mudbank on one side of the arroyo, turned up his coat collar, and collected a small bundle of dead greasewood twigs. Luckily he had matches, although his cigarette case was empty. He covered the blaze, holding his hands to the feeble blaze, until the twigs were consumed. It was too dark to find more. Well, he must make the best of it.

Crouching in his shallow cave, his stomach empty, his feet and legs numb with cold, his hands smarting from the pricks of thorns, his eyes filled with dust, his whole figure covered with white powder of alkali, he pictured himself in the dining car of the limited discussing the menu with Anna under the electric lamps.

He could not endure his cramped position for long, however, and presently found it necessary to get up and stretch. As he stood there, facing the darkness single-handed, he felt a curious exaltation of spirit, coupled with a strange accession of purely physical strength. After all, he wasn't going to die out there; he didn't have to freeze or starve to death simply because that fool train had gone off and left him. He'd beat his way out of the mess somehow!

A moan came from the north. The darkness found its way to the Sierras! The moan rose to a roar that steadily grew in volume. Great towering clouds of alkali came drifting across the plain, and the air was thick with sand that peppered his face and hands. For the first time his adventure appeared ominous. As he was about to return to the shelter of the arroyo, he caught the gleam of twin motor lights a mile or more away, wavering through the darkness.

Rand began running toward the approaching lights, which bobbed erratically up and down. He stumbled madly through the dark clouds, carrying with him one yucca to anchor, and tearing his clothes upon the mesquite and prickly pear. Nearly exhausted, he reached a point directly in front of the car and the next instant he was in the full glare of the headlights, his hands up in a warning shout into the teeth of the gale. The motor stopped, dropped into low gear, and crept toward him.

A voice shouted from behind the lights, "Put up both your hands!"

RAND quickly raised his arms again and found himself looking straight into the muzzle of a revolver.

"What do you want?" came from above the shriek of the wind.

"I got left behind out there by the limited," he answered. "Can you give me a light to the next town?"

The engine ceased throbbing. Something flashed behind the revolver. The motor lights faded out.

"Stay where you are till I give you the once over!" The voice was a woman's. Rand waited, arms extended like a scarecrow, while the owner of the voice inspected him carefully by means of a trouble light.

"You're Mr. Gifford Rand, aren't you?" Rand could not help laughing. Fame had its uses, after all!

"That's who I am," he admitted. "Do you mind if I drop my hands?" A chuckle came from the light.

"Funny!" I thought you were trying to hold me up. But can you blame me? Do you get left that way often?" Without waiting for his answer she returned the pistol to her belt, cracked the driver, got in, and turned on the lights again.

"Climb aboard."

Rand did so, wondering what she looked like. The girl threw in her gears and they moved off. "How did you know my name?" he asked, peering at her.

"I've seen you playing polo. Every g. in Santa Barbara knows you by sight."

"And may I ask to whom I owe my 'reputation'?"

"My name is Isabella Banda," she answered. "My father has a ranch out beyond the San Marcos. I teach at the high school in the winter." Her voice and enunciation were both alluring. But a school teacher! An old maid, probably!

"How did you manage to be marooned?"

"The train stopped and I got off to pick some flowers."

"Oh!" she laughed. "I suppose I sound all kinds of an idiot," he said.

"Not at all!" she responded gallily. "You sound very gallant!" It was the first time that the obvious connection of his adventure had suggested itself to him.

"What are you doing in the desert at this hour of the night?" he countered.

you do? You couldn't sleep out all night alone."

"Why not? The ground's warm," she answered, with evident amusement. "Don't take me for a society girl. I'm not. I'm just one of the hot polo!" They were yelling at each other against the noise of the wind which bombarded the windshield with sand. Rand admitted her control of the wheel, which she never lost, despite ruts, boulders and cavities. They entered a narrow canyon. Suddenly the girl threw on both brakes and the car skidded to a halt. The end of a broken girder showed where a bridge had once spanned the sides.

"There's been a washout," she announced. Looks as if we'd have to spend the night here."

Rand stared at her incredulously. "Here?" he repeated.

"We've no choice," she answered. "The only other road is through Jawbone Canyon at the other end of the valley, sixty miles away. It may be just as bad as this. We'll have to sleep here and work our way out of this in the morning."

"Nonsense! We can't sleep here!" he exclaimed against. "We'd freeze to death! We—"

But she had already leaped from the car.

"Had your supper?" she shouted, making a funnel of her hands. "I haven't!" Her suggestion seemed to him utterly fantastic.

"There's firewood in the driver," she explained. "And a canteen of water. I always carry both. With wood and water you can go anywhere."

"Wood and water?" An hour ago his accommodations upon the train had seemed mediocre enough. He had shared Anna's amusements upon the shabbiness of the woodwork and upholstery, the bad taste of the decorations, the tumpiness of the mattresses, the inferiority of the food. She had, in fact, made rather a point of her ability to put up with discomfort of being a good traveler. He laughed into the storm, which shrieked satirically in reply. He wished Anna were there, and could see this other girl calmly preparing to make a night of it in the face of such a trial of the elements.

"I'll leave the car here for a wind-breaker," she said. "And we can build our fire behind that point of rock." He carried the canteen and the bundle of roots which she unearthed from between the seats to the dark, and watched while she laid the fire, struck a match, and lit it in the full force of the wind. In the fierce draft the dry mesquite roared white in an instant. And then, to his amazement, there appeared beside the fire a coffee-pot, a frying pan and a paper of chops.

"You might make some toast," she suggested. "There's a loaf of bread in the sack under the front seat, and butter in the tin cracker box." So they sat on their heels, sliding their eyes from the sparks which flew from the fanned embers, while the chops sizzled and the steam fished from the spout of the coffee pot.

He could see now the charm of her profile—its small, straight nose, the way her brows protesting against the smoke, and the full curve of her pursed, determined lips. Over her line bespoke vigor, courage, competency.

"Come and get it!" directed the girl, holding out the frying pan.

Crouching side by side to windward they rolled and found themselves

of the fire, they ate their supper, and in spite of the cold and darkness Rand had never so enjoyed a meal.

SHE had thrown herself on the ground and, with her chin in her hands, she was eyeing him curiously. Stretched thus in the freight, she was as lithe and graceful as one of Barry's panthers. He had seen nothing so ravishingly pretty during his entire stay in the west. The wind blew the girl's corn-colored hair forward across her temples, and she brushed it away with an impatient gesture. He had ceased to intrude her appearance with that of Anna, to the latter's disadvantage. He had forgotten Anna entirely.

"Well," she murmured drowsily, after a silence, "how about turning in?"

He looked at her. "Where do you propose to sleep?" he asked.

"In front of the car. It's quite level."

"But you can't sleep on the ground. It's too hard. Besides, you'd never close your eyes in this wind. And you'd freeze before morning!"

"Nonsense!" she retorted, springing to her feet. "We'll be warm as toast in that blanket! As for the wind, I can fix that easily enough. After having rescued you from the terrors of the desert I'm not going to let you freeze, poor dear!"

"But couldn't I sleep in the car?"

"It's a pretty big car," she laughed. "And a very small car!" He really would freeze if you tried that."

"All the same, I don't see you sleeping on this gravel, with the wind blowing the sand in your face, even if you manage to keep warm," he protested.

"One's body can stand a lot more than most people realize," she replied. "One can sleep anywhere—so long as the ground is flat."

She began kicking the stones out of the road and leveling the sand. He watched her, that just this time in the opposite direction—due west. An hour, and the snow had disappeared from the desert floor, and each dried watercourse had become a rushing torrent. Everywhere appeared once more the drifts of scarlet, gold and purple that had been his undoing of the day before. How strangely beautiful this wide land of sand and sky and sunlight, of cactus and snow-crowned crest! How vigorous and free the life it offered! If it wasn't for Anna! He wondered if he could stand New York eleven months in the year. Anna would probably want to go to Newport. He loathed Newport.

"What do you do for a living?" suddenly asked the girl.

"I pass for a tired business man!" he answered, with a laugh. "I'm supposed to be a stock broker, but the fact is I've a complacent partner who lets me do as I choose. And I

back to back, each entwined tightly in the rug."

"Now pull down our awning, and we shall be as snug as can be!" she laughed. Having managed to get his head inside the cover, Rand discovered to his astonishment that they were absolutely protected. The wind was as lithe and graceful as one of Barry's panthers. He had seen nothing so ravishingly pretty during his entire stay in the west. The wind blew the girl's corn-colored hair forward across her temples, and she brushed it away with an impatient gesture. He had ceased to intrude her appearance with that of Anna, to the latter's disadvantage. He had forgotten Anna entirely.

"Good night!" she said, in a sleepy voice. "Pleasant dreams!"

A STIFLING sensation of weight upon his face awoke him. His hand, when he thrust it forth, came in contact with something cold and white. The place beside him was empty.

"Isabella!" he cried, startled. Then he lifted the envelope and looked out. The ground was snow-covered, the world as white as a sheet. From behind the rocks came the snap of burning twigs and the smell of smoke. Already she was busy with the frying-pan.

"Hello!" she called. "Are you awake?"

"Only just!" he replied comfortingly. "I thought for a minute that I'd lost you."

"Not yet!" she retorted. "You've got to endure me for at least five hours more!"

"You can't make it too long for me!" he asserted.

They breakfasted in highest spirits, in an amphitheater of snow-capped peaks. The wind ceased, the sun burned hot out of a burnished sky. He replaced their fragmentary outfit in the driver, while Isabella melted the ice in the pail, refilled the radiator, and turned the car. Once more he was beside her, speeding across the plain; but this time in the opposite direction—due west. An hour, and the snow had disappeared from the desert floor, and each dried watercourse had become a rushing torrent. Everywhere appeared once more the drifts of scarlet, gold and purple that had been his undoing of the day before. How strangely beautiful this wide land of sand and sky and sunlight, of cactus and snow-crowned crest! How vigorous and free the life it offered! If it wasn't for Anna! He wondered if he could stand New York eleven months in the year. Anna would probably want to go to Newport. He loathed Newport.

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"I pass for a tired business man!" he answered, with a laugh. "I'm supposed to be a stock broker, but the fact is I've a complacent partner who lets me do as I choose. And I

choose to play polo most of the time. I put up the money. I put up the brains. My grandfather used to have a stock farm up in the Berkshires, and—well, I've always had an idea that maybe some time—"

"I see," she nodded. "But why don't you do it now, when you can enjoy it? 'Some time' isn't any time, is it?"

"Perhaps you're right," he said. "But, after all, there's a lot to consider. Stock farming isn't much of a career in the east. Besides, one has a duty to society and to one's family."

"Yes," she agreed, readily enough. "Of course one has a duty to one's family! By the way, I wonder if they are worrying about you?" Rand did not think it necessary to explain that Anna was the only living person who by any possibility could qualify as "family," actual or prospective.

What had she done when he had failed to turn up for dinner? Had she assumed merely that he had got into a bridge game, or had she become worried over his non-appearance, and—when he could not be found—concluded that he had fallen overboard?

He wondered how seriously, after all, Anna would have taken his sudden demise. She would probably have married Tommy Burnham inside of a year, and looked more like a Persian princess than ever.

There was nothing Persian about Isabella, however! Simple, straightforward, unpretentious, she was frankly of the west! Mighty sensible in her ideas on almost everything. He looked forward with increasing depression to the moment when they must part—east to east, west to west!

He was startled by the sound of a late hour to look for his body. At the time of going to press no word had been received."

Directly beneath appeared the following:

"New York, April 20.—Rand & Krayne, stock brokers at 20 Wall street, announced their voluntary suspension today. The reason is understood to be heavy losses in the recent prolonged rise. Mr. Rand, who is internationally famous as a polo player, is in California. Mr. Krayne, the other member of the firm, could not be seen last night. The firm's assets are given as \$2,700,000 as against liabilities of \$4,300,000."

Rand gazed stupidly at the printed words.

"First you heard of it?" inquired the operator. He nodded.

"Fact is," explained the operator, "this message was relayed from Los Angeles at 9 o'clock last night and couldn't be delivered in the limited 'cause you wasn't aboard. That's how they knew they'd lost you. Here it is!" Rand received the yellow envelope automatically.

"A book of verses underneath the bough. A jug of wine, a loaf of bread—and thou beside me singing in the wilderness—Oh, wilderness were Paradise now!"

—he read.

She smiled whimsically.

"Now we're even!" she declared. "Honestly, though! I should never have suspected it of you!"

"I mean it," he said fervently. "I thought of it a lot last night as we sat there by the fire. I've never met anybody half as—jolly as you, Isabella!"

"Nonsense!" she replied, and a faint tinge of red crept to her cheek.

He thrust the book back into his pocket, not knowing what more to say.

"We'd best go straight back to Barstow," she announced, after a somewhat prolonged silence. "They're probably horribly disappointed about you on the train. You ought to communicate with them just as soon as you can."

It was high noon before they reached the junction at Barstow. As Isabella ran the driver up to the steps of the station, he felt a sudden burning bereavement possessed him. He had lived more in the last twelve hours than in the preceding twelve weeks, and he had found, out there in the desert, his heart's true desire. And now he must lose her—forever. After all, he was more or less committed to Anna! Yet down in his soul he knew that already she meant more to him than Anna ever had or ever would. Ruthlessly he climbed down out of the dilapidated driver and held out his hand to her.

"I suppose it's good-bye," he said, with an attempt at a smile. "I can't ever properly thank you for what you've done—and for what you've taught me. You've given me a new point of view entirely. You must let me write to you." He stifled the ironic speculation as to how Anna, if she knew the whole story, would feel about this. "And you won't forget me, will you? Promise."

"I promise," she answered, seriously. "I'm not going to leave you yet, until you know what train you can catch. I've missed today already. I shall send the principal a wire that I'm detained."

"Bully!" he exclaimed, delighted at the thought of another hour in her company. "I'll be gone only a minute."

The station was empty save for the telegraph operator.

"When is the next train for the east?" Rand asked.

"Two-thirty."

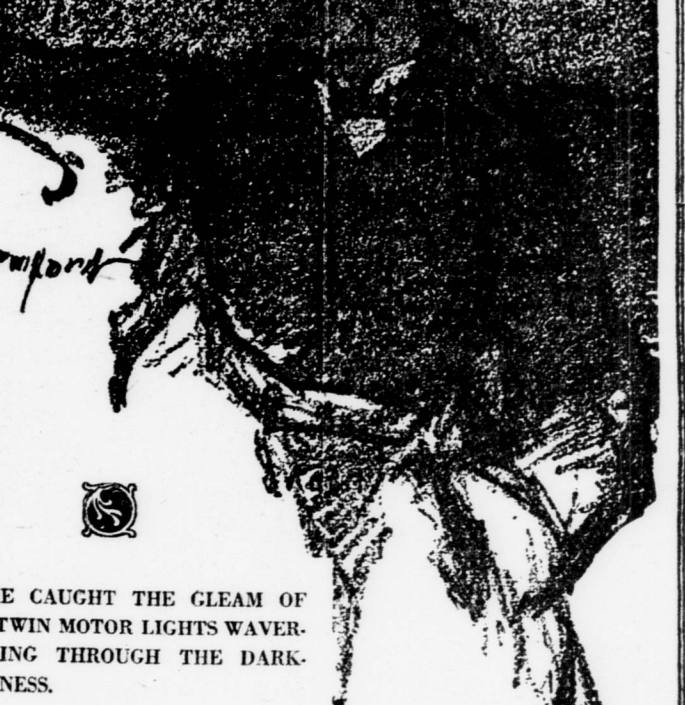
"May I send a telegram?" For answer the man shoved him a blank.

"Miss Anna Borland," Rand began, "Sunset Limited. Was accidentally left behind last evening when train stopped between stations. Am all right. Will see you immediately on arrival in New York Saturday morning. Gifford Rand."

The operator read it.

"Your name Rand?" he asked.

"That's my name." The man looked him over.



HE CAUGHT THE GLEAM OF  
TWIN MOTOR LIGHTS WAVER-  
ING THROUGH THE DARK-  
NESS.

"I wasn't hiding," answered Rand. "This'll be 81 cents. See this morning's Examiner?" The man thrust a newspaper under the lattice. Across the top of the page, above the photograph of a big man in polo costume, ran a two-inch scare head:

"Polo Player Financially Ruined—Leaps From Train."

"Gifford Rand, millionaire stock broker and sportsman, jumped last evening from the Sunset Limited to what is assumed to be instant death, on learning that his entire fortune had been swept away in the failure of the well known Wall street firm of Rand & Krayne. Friends on the train wired of his disappearance in the midst of the desert, and a special was dispatched from Barstow at a late hour to look for his body. At the time of going to press no word had been received."

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"Dear Giff," read the message. "I broke my word and played the market. We are both wiped out. I am ashamed and sorry. Forgive me, old chap, if you can. Krayne."

RAND staggered as if struck sharply on the cranium by an opponent's mallet in a scrimmage. Then he came back swiftly. After all, only a wallop! But a hard one!

He strode a few paces up and down in front of the newsstand. Bankrupt, was he? They thought he was dead? He couldn't support Anna now, even if he wanted to! She wouldn't have him if he asked her! Quickly he turned and stepped back to the window.

"Give me back that 81 cents," he said. "You needn't send that telegram!"

"Well," Isabella asked, as he came down the steps and stood beside her, "when do you leave?"

"I'm not leaving," he replied, significantly. "I've chucked the east forever, or rather the east has chucked me. I'm going to start all over again out here."

Something in his manner, the relieved, almost ecstatic expression of his brown eyes, gave her a wild thrill. Could he know that for the past three months he had been her hero? There was a queer trembling in her throat. She dared not look at him.

"I'm—I'm glad!" she murmured, with closed eyes. He laid his hand on hers.

"Isabella!" he stammered. "I—I—Do you think—? Oh, hang it! He stopped short and stumbled in his pocket. There was a sound of turning leaves. Then in a low, excited voice she heard him read:

"Ah, my beloved, lift the cup that clears Myself with yesterday's seven thousand years! Today of past we're and future fears. Tomorrow? Why, tomorrow I may be—"

(Copyright, 1923.)